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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000047

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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION LEADER UPBEAT ON 2004

REF: (A) 03 HARARE 2455 (B) 03 HARARE 2443 (C) 03

HARARE 2412

Classified By: Political Officer Win Dayton under Section 1.5(b)(d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: With qualified optimism, MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai offered an assessment of Zimbabwe's political landscape to Ambassador Sullivan during lunch on January 7 at the Residence. Tsvangirai identified mobilization of membership, coordination with civil society, and improving the election environment as tactical party priorities in the coming year. He was non-committal about mass action and held out the possibility that the MDC would not participate in elections if election atmospherics and mechanics did not improve. While still skeptical of South African President Mbeki's motives, Tsvangirai surmised that Mbeki had pressed Mugabe meaningfully during his December visit and predicted that the GOZ would be more susceptible to foreign pressure in coming months. END SUMMARY.

Party Mobilization, Election Preparations  
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2. (C) Accompanied by MDC Secretary for Presidential Affairs Gandhi Mudzingwa, Tsvangirai expressed appreciation for Secretary Powell's response to his letter last month. He

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said he was pleased with the results of last month's MDC national conference (ref A), which fostered grassroots momentum among middle class and rural constituencies. Further mobilization of those constituencies would absorb substantial party energy in coming months, in part with a view to mass action. Tsvangirai did not say when mass action might commence but indicated that it would require close coordination with civil society groups.

3. (C) Tsvangirai indicated that the party's preoccupation with training, building, and reinforcing party structures and motivating the membership would be geared in large party to election preparations. He expected that parliamentary elections would be conducted within six to 18 months, depending on when ZANU-PF perceived it had the strongest advantage. The intimidating environment and GOZ control of election administration continued to offer the ruling party a prohibitive advantage. The MDC would consider boycotting elections altogether if the situation did not improve, although he conceded that the party risked sliding into irrelevance if it walked away. In that vein, MDC participation in elections would depend largely on international posture toward the election environment and the ruling party.

Change in Ruling Party Posture?  
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4. (C) Tsvangirai asserted that ZANU-PF may be more attentive to international opinion in coming months. For example, the ruling party may be reluctant to manipulate elections to yield itself the two thirds parliamentary majority it would like in order to engineer controversial constitutional changes. He noted that the GOZ had signalled interest in re-engaging with the Bretton Woods institutions, which would likely entail enhancing the credibility of both economic policy and the political situation. Indeed, the country's dire economic straits -- of late manifested in the precarious financial sector -- left the ruling party little choice but to work on its international credibility in economic and political spheres. New Reserve Bank Chairman Gideon Gono's rise to prominence gave the regime a confident voice for re-engagement. Tsvangirai concluded that the ruling party would not sacrifice these longer term interests for the short-term expedience of getting a two thirds majority.

5. (C) According to Tsvangirai, Mbeki's visit (ref B) helped to drive home to Mugabe the imperative of political progress. Mbeki would have had to impress on Mugabe the length to which he had gone for Mugabe and the extent to which Mbeki's

own credibility was on the line domestically, regionally, and internationally. Tsvangirai trusted that Mbeki had elicited from Mugabe a commitment to dialogue, and hoped that Mugabe's exit was "part and parcel" of the commitment. Tsvangirai added that the CHOGM affair further underscored South Africa's importance to Zimbabwe, and Mugabe would have to deliver something. Nonetheless, ZANU-PF still appeared to be playing for time a month, a week, a day at a time -- a situation that effectively diluted the impact of outside pressure.

16. (C) Tsvangirai confirmed that there was no progress since Mbeki's visit toward recommencement of interparty talks. Mbeki's assignment to the parties was to work out a program for talks, which would require more work by MDC negotiating team and additional engagement between party Secretary General Welshman Ncube and Minister of Justice Patrick Chinamasa. He concluded that substantive progress would be impossible while Mugabe was out of the country. (NOTE: The GOZ reports that Mugabe is "on leave" until the end of January. He reportedly plans to be in Asia much of that time, beginning with Indonesia and Malaysia. South African Ambassador Ndou advised Ambassador (septel) that SAG expected progress toward talks to continue regardless of Mugabe's absence. END NOTE.)

#### Land Reform

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17. (C) Commenting on the MDC land reform policy articulated at the national conference, Tsvangirai asserted that it was an approach that should benefit and appeal to the masses, including the poor. He confirmed that there was no going back to Zimbabwe's status quo ante. Imparting value to the land, including the communal areas, was a central priority. Considerable attention would be required to establish a model for allocation of titles. A rationalization exercise -- grounded on consistent plot sizes, one farm per family, productive capacity -- would weed out many but not all of the current beneficiaries of GOZ land reform. Beneficiaries with alternative viable occupations, such as civil servants and military personnel, would likely be given a choice between land and position. The new system would significantly alter traditional patronage relationships and means of social control in rural areas. A transparent, widely consultative process would be key in assuring the program's success. Tsvangirai conceded that the party would have difficulty

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overcoming official obstacles in publicizing the program to rural areas, and would have to rely on the party's growing personally based networks.

#### Harare Hassles

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18. (C) Tsvangirai confirmed newspaper reports that the investigative report into alleged corruption and mismanagement by Harare's City Council and Mayor Mudzuri (ref C) was complete but had yet to be released. He predicted that the report would be relatively objective and would identify legitimate shortcomings that would fall short of justifying dismissal. At the same time, Mudzuri's uncooperative interaction with the investigating commission would likely reflect poorly on him in the report. The Council suffered from inexperience and susceptibility to corruption but seemed to be gaining competence with the passage of time, in part because of MDC efforts to organize and discipline wayward members. He noted that Christopher Mushonga was one of the more experienced councillors but suffered flaws such as unseemly patronage arrangements.

19. (C) According to Tsvangirai, municipal administration put ZANU-PF in a quandary. Local Government Minister Chombo was working hard to hamstring MDC-controlled municipalities, especially Harare, but dismissing the Harare Mayor and Council outright would undercut efforts to burnish the government's image internationally. In the end, he expected the process to serve as a "verbal warning" to Harare's MDC administration. If personnel were dismissed, new elections would yield a new or rejuvenated MDC-dominated council in any event. Tsvangirai underscored the value of USAID assistance that would help MDC municipal administration and urged that we explore opportunities in this area.

#### Regional Outreach

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19. (C) Tsvangirai expressed satisfaction with continuing MDC efforts to engage regional leaders and parties. The party planned following up soon with Nigeria, Senegal, and Kenya, and was interested in tapping Ghanaian experiences in election organization. Tsvangirai acknowledged with the appreciation the "courage" of Botswana's supportive efforts.

#### Comment

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10. (C) Tsvangirai was surprisingly upbeat in his new year's tour d'horizon. We remain skeptical. The insecurity, lack of meaningful debate, and combustible rhetoric associated with the ZANU-PF national conference and CHOGM fall-out suggest a hardened ruling party posture, notwithstanding Gono's refreshing voice and Mbeki's efforts. Early litmus tests of GOZ sincerity likely will include progress in the Ncube-Chinamasa engagement, disposition of the Harare Council/Mayor controversy, Tsvangirai's treason trial (due to recommence January 19), and adjudication of the MDC's election petition (also likely to resume this month).  
SULLIVAN